FEATURE:
FRANCOPHONE BUDDHIST STUDIES

Introduction

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ALTHOUGH *The Eastern Buddhist* is published in English, with a few rare exceptions in earlier days,[1] it is healthy on occasion to look beyond this linguistic sphere. With this in mind, we present in this issue a special feature on francophone studies of Buddhism. The use of the word "francophone" is intended to recall that Buddhist studies in French quite significantly transcend the national boundaries of France to include Belgium and Switzerland. Indeed, research has been authored in French in other countries too, notably in Asia. The encyclopaedic Buddhist dictionary *Hōbōgirin*, for example, has so far been compiled in French, in Japan, by an international team. It goes without saying that francophone studies of Buddhism have a most illustrious reputation, thanks to the groundbreaking research of well-known figures such as Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852) in France and Étienne Lamotte (1903–1983) in Belgium. Admittedly, these two authors have recently become more widely known in the English-speaking world through easily locatable translations of some of their more substantial works, although the time-lag has been significant. Moreover, as specialists know, there is so much more to be celebrated that is not available in English. It is quite impractical to attempt an overall view of francophone Buddhist studies here, but the present feature presents a few varied contributions that both give some impressions of how francophone studies of Buddhism have developed and are themselves of intrinsic interest.

[1] Two short pieces by Martin Heidegger appeared in German in the New Series, vol. 1, no. 2 (1966).

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It is notable that French studies of Buddhism have long focused on the interface between Indian and East Asian Buddhism. This stands in some contrast to the historical dominance of interest in the Pali Canon on the part of the earlier German and British researchers. That interest was fuelled not least by the assumption that the Theravada tradition enshrined the most ancient traditions of Buddhism, an assumption that is gently questioned in the article by Constantin Regamey on the research methods of Stanisław Schayer. Conversely, the Mahayana was usually more prominent in francophone studies, an early high point being Burnouf's translation of the *Lotus Sutra* (1852), with substantial annotations in a volume of their own, and Lamotte's translations of the *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論 (Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom, 1944) and of the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* (1962). Yet these are but the prominent tip of a great iceberg, for there were also important early translations of Vijñānavāda texts by Sylvain Lévi (1863–1935) and a crucial translation of sections of Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* by the Swiss scholar Jacques May (1927–2018).[2] These works all contributed hugely to wider knowledge of the two main intellectual schools of Mahayana Buddhism.

Francophone interest in the migration of Buddhism from India to China arose early. For one thing, an impetus was given by very important French participation in archaeological discoveries in Central Asia, led notably by Paul Pelliot (1878–1945). Rather different, but also significant, is that whereas British interests lay above all in India and Ceylon (as then known), French colonial interests and power lay to the southeast of India in an area known tellingly as "Indo-Chine," with China in the background. Admittedly, the French scholar Alfred Foucher (1865–1952) pursued what he considered to be the Greek origins of Buddhist iconography in the northwest of India and, as researched by George Cœdès (1886–1969), the older kingdoms of Southeast Asia were, for their part, largely Hinduistic in their symbolism. On the other hand, in the compassionate faces seen among the massive temple ruins of Angkor Thom in Cambodia there is a tantalizing glimpse of what may have been a Mahayana Buddhist orientation. Stronger hints are found in the Javanese site of Borobudur, with its huge mandala-like architecture, first studied in detail by Paul Mus (1902–1969) in his two-volume work *Barabudur*, published in Hanoi in 1935.

Complexity in the Buddhism of Southeast Asia was reflected in a huge collection of papers in French and in English that ran to about one thousand

[2] A full and detailed account of May's life and work by Vincent Eltschinger was recently published in *Etudes Asiatiques - Asiatische Studien* 73, no. 1 (2019), pp. 1–38.

pages and was entitled *Présence du Bouddhisme*. This work, marking the supposed two-thousand-five-hundredth anniversary of the Buddha's nirvana, was first published as a special issue of *France-Asie* in 1959, and in view of its eminent contributors and its varied historic perceptions of Buddhism, it was republished by Gallimard in Paris in 1987.[3] The journal *France-Asie* itself was published every other month out of Saigon from 1946 onwards.

As to textual studies, it soon became clear that Chinese sources were crucial for the study of Mahayana Buddhism because of their relative antiquity when compared with the much later extant manuscripts in Sanskrit. Terminological interactions were investigated at a very early date by Stanislas Julien (1797–1873) in his fascinating work *Méthode pour déchiffrer et transcrire les noms sanscrits qui se rencontrent dans les livres chinois*, enchantingly subtitled "Eureka" and glossed as "Imprimé par l'autorisation de l'Empereur." The work was indeed printed at the Imprimerie Impériale in Paris in 1861. Its purpose was to set out, systematically, the ways in which Chinese writers transliterated Sanskrit terms by making use of the abbreviated phonetic values of individual characters, for example, 阿 for "A," and so on. Simple though this may seem to outsiders, the complexities accumulate considerably, and, perusing this work, one wonders if its dedication to Indologist Max Müller was not merely a trans-European compliment but also something of a slight tease. Linguistic and conceptual transfers from India to China were treated very significantly in other ways in *The Buddhist Conquest of China* (1959) by Erik Zürcher (1928–2008). Zürcher, a Dutchman based in Leiden, was closely associated with the francophone world, and sometimes published in French as well as in Dutch and English.

In Vietnam, the major focus of French colonial influence, it was obvious that Chinese texts were the basis of the Buddhism of that country, dominated as it was by the Thiền (Jp. Zen) and Amidist traditions. With increasing knowledge of the "présence du Bouddhisme" in later centuries, attention to these strands of tradition that focused on the practices of *dhyāna* and devotion to Amida increased. They are after all the dominant forms of Chinese-influenced Buddhism from Vietnam right across to Japan, though there are important national and sectarian variations. It is not surprising that the Vietnamese monk Thích Nhất Hạnh (b. 1926) made meditational (Zen) practice the focus of his long-term home and teaching center in France, or that the Swiss scholar Jérome Ducor, who writes in the present issue, was

[3] There is an informative review by Bernard Faure in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (1988), pp. 834–35.

attracted to the Amida-oriented Jōdo Shin Buddhism of Japan. It may seem slightly surprising that the Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac, treated in some detail by Ducor and James Fredericks in this issue, should become an influential author on Amida.

We include in this issue a fascinating dialogue between Émile Guimet and representatives of the Shin Buddhist tradition. As a private collector-scholar, Guimet was the founding figure of the Musée Guimet, and his goal of presenting the Buddhist "pantheon" is discussed in the article by Frédéric Girard.[4] In the Japanese context, mention must also be made of the independent scholar Gaston Renondeau (1879–1976) who not only was one of the first westerners to write on the *yamabushi* 山伏 of medieval times and on Buddhism in the Noh theater, but also made crucial information available about Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) through his translations of leading texts. His work in the 1950s and 1960s was a most valuable teaching resource during the second half of the twentieth century, when alternatives were still scarce.

Over the years, the value of Tibetan versions (though late as manuscripts) had also become clearer as additional sources for early Mahayana writings. But Tibet was also being "discovered" in its own right, as exemplified by the first appearance in 1952 of *Le Concile de Lhasa: Une controverse sur le quiétisme entre bouddhistes de l'Inde et de la Chine au VIIIe siècle de l'ère chrétienne* by the Swiss (and later naturalized French) Paul Demiéville (1894–1979), who is otherwise widely known for his work on Central Asian manuscripts and as founding editor of the *Hōbōgirin*. More recently, the tantric forms of Buddhism in Tibet as well as the Shingon and esoteric Tendai Buddhism of Japan have begun to sway the imagination of scholars across all language barriers. This feeds into the recent strong investment in studies of the enigmatic interplay between Buddhism and Shinto in pre-modern times. But with this development, French scholars such as Bernard Faure have also been drawn into the American orbit and have begun to write much more in English. Tellingly, the journal *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie*, published from Kyoto, was bilingual from its beginnings in the 1980s, and regular public meetings of the École Française de l'Extrême Orient are also usually conducted in English nowadays. Even the linguistic future of the fabled *Hōbōgirin* is currently undetermined, as is noted in the survey by Iyanaga Nobumi within. Are we now witnessing the gradual *démise* of

[4] An English-language translation of the museum catalogue *Le Pantheón bouddhique au Japon*, introduced by Bernard Frank, is currently being prepared by Dennis Gira.

francophone Buddhist studies? Surely this would be undesirable. To some degree the diversity of languages is accompanied by different patterns of reflection. The various *présences*, *panthéons*, *imaginaires*, and *rhétoriques* are always with us somehow, and long may it remain so!